

**NORTHAMPTON**  
**CENTRAL AREA ACTION PLAN**

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**STATEMENT**

**MATTER 5: HOUSING**

Planning Policy Team  
August 2012



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- 5.1 *Although the amount of new housing is significant (up to 3,400 additional homes over the plan period), does policy 16 provide enough qualitative direction to achieve some of the Council's aspirations, as set out in paragraphs 6.0.15-6.0.17, such as to provide a more **balanced mix of communities, affordable housing** and purpose-built **student accommodation**? In relation to proportions of different types of housing provision, is the term 'predominantly' sufficiently focused to ensure that future housing provision meets the Council's housing objectives?*
- 5.1.1 The Council is committed to achieve the delivery of a balanced mix of communities within the Central Area of Northampton. Policy 16 of the AAP was set out to contribute towards achieving the Council's aspiration together with additional policies and guidance provided both within the AAP and within relevant accompanying documents referred to below.
- 5.1.2 Policy H1 of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) seeks to ensure that an appropriate mix of housing is provided which reflects the needs of existing and future households, whilst taking into account the evidence provided by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update (SHMA) (Opinion Research Services Aug 11)(H/007/4). Paragraph 9.9 however states that whilst the SHMA provides the starting point for the consideration of size and mix, it will also be necessary to consider specific local circumstances as well as needs.
- 5.1.3 Policy H1 states that housing developments will be expected to make the most efficient use of land having regard to the location and setting of the site, the existing character and density of the local area, the accessibility to services and facilities, the implications of density for affordability and viability and the impact on the amenities of occupiers of neighbouring properties.
- 5.1.4 The Council supports the general approach proposed in Policy H1 of the JCS. Policy 16 is formulated having regard to the specific local circumstances of the Northampton Central Area. Policy 16 seeks to allocate sites for residential development to help manage the delivery of an appropriate mix of housing, attracting different groups of people into the town. As the technical paper (CAAP/S/001) for Policy 16 explains, the evidence base identified that a crucial element in improving the vibrancy and vitality of the Northampton Central Area is to attract a younger target group to the core part of the central area as residents.
- 5.1.5 The evidence base also found that those younger target groups seek urban living lifestyles with preferences for living in a flat within walking distance of the town centre, near a vibrant mix of activities. In terms of Northampton's central area characteristics, these groups of people are more likely to be attracted to housing within or adjacent to the inner ring road which is located close to town centre uses. Providing predominantly small units of housing is also more likely to be viable and more appropriate in terms of the existing character and density of the local area located within the core part of the town centre, which is in line with Policy H1 of the JCS.
- 5.1.6 Some recent examples of residential development provided within the Central Area that predominantly comprised of one or two bedroom apartments, are the Pinnacle (Woolmonger Street) and Bloomsbury (Guildhall Road). The Pinnacle has 135 dwellings with 43 one bedroom and 92 two bedrooms. The Bloomsbury consists of 132 dwellings, of which 122 are two bedroom and 10

units are one bedroom. Both developments, completed in 2008, provide a mix of rent, shared ownership and outright sale. The Housing Association confirmed in August 2012 that both apartment blocks are currently fully occupied and which provides clear evidence of demand. Conversely apart from the occasional conversion of an office into a town house, family accommodation has only been provided in one location in the town centre over the last 15 years in Scholars Court, off Derngate, (16 x 3 bedroom town houses). Few young families have lived in these properties; they have predominantly either been occupied by young professional couples, older downsizers, or are shared properties.

- 5.1.7 In helping to meet the need for family housing, the Waterside: Avon/ Nunn Mills / Ransome Road, for instance, is one of the allocated sites for residential development by Policy 16. Policy 28 provides further detail for the development stating that the majority of the site area will be family orientated housing. Spring Boroughs is also allocated for housing development and Policy 24 states that a more balanced community should be encouraged. Policy 24 together with Policy 16 requires the provision of family housing in order to achieve a balanced community. Both sites will have access to appropriate facilities such as a school, community facility and open space. The allocations providing for family housing are consistent with Policy H1 of the JCS in terms of the most efficient use of land, the existing character and density of the local area, accessibility to services and facilities, the implications of density for affordability and viability and the impact on the amenities of occupiers of neighbouring properties.
- 5.1.8 For the reasons outlined above the term 'predominantly' is considered appropriate. It reflects the likely development scenarios that will come forward within the town centre, taking into account the likely characteristics of development sites. The Council would not want to prejudice the provision of family housing in the town centre or on its edges where the potential arises. However, neither does it want to stifle potential regeneration activity by giving the impression that it would consistently seek a mix of dwelling types in all scenarios within an area which is likely to have locations with constraints which will make family housing difficult to achieve.
- 5.1.9 In regard to affordable housing, the JCS contains a series of policies relating to its provision. Policy H2 is particularly relevant to Northampton Central Area, which sets out the percentage requirements and site size thresholds for on-site provision of affordable housing. Policy H2 sets out that 35% of affordable housing will be required on sites of 15 or more dwellings located within Northampton Borough based on the findings of the SHMA and the Viability Appraisal (H/007/4).
- 5.1.10 The Council has recently prepared additional policy guidance in respect of affordable housing provision. A draft Affordable Housing Interim Statement (June 2012) (H/007/5) was approved by Cabinet for consultation in January 2012 and published for consultation in June 2012. This statement sets out to provide more detailed policy guidance on the provision of affordable housing requirements in Northampton including threshold, mix and type.
- 5.1.11 The reason why the Interim Statement was prepared is because, while preparation of the JCS is ongoing, the Council considers that there is a need for up to date guidance on the provision of affordable housing in the area reflecting the latest evidence of housing need and the changing policy

context. It is recognised that the adoption of the Northampton Affordable Housing Interim Statement will fall outside of the statutory procedures for development plan adoption and that it will not form part of the development plan. It will however be used as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

- 5.1.12 The Interim Statement sets out the same percentage requirements and site size thresholds for on site provision of affordable housing as that outlined in Policy H2 of the JCS. However, it does provide further guidance in respect of the tenure split, of which 70% consists of social rent and 30% consists of intermediate housing. The reason for setting out the requirement of the tenure split is because the Council do not believe that a requirement solely for social rented housing would create mixed stable communities as explained in paragraph 5.1.18 below. It is also noted that this may vary from site to site, depending on location, viability, and need. This will be negotiated on a site-by-site basis with developers especially in light of the changes to the social housing grant regime through the Affordable Housing Programme 2011-15 and implementation of 'Affordable Rent' as an affordable housing product.
- 5.1.13 Affordable housing provision within the Central Area will therefore be guided primarily by Policy H2 of the JCS and the Draft Affordable Housing Interim Statement.
- 5.1.14 In relation to purpose-built student accommodation, the evidence base including SHMA, and the Housing Strategy 2010 – 2015 (Northampton Borough Council, 2010) (H/007/6) did not identify a need for purpose-built student accommodation. However, planning permission has been granted for the proposal of a 464-bed student accommodation for the University of Northampton in St John's. The construction, which started in July 2012, is to be opened in January 2014. The approval of this purpose built student accommodation demonstrates that the policies within the AAP Pre-Submission draft are effective, as they successfully attracted the attention of the University of Northampton and led to the proposal for additional student accommodation located within the Town Centre Boundary.
- 5.1.15 In conclusion, the Council considers that Policy 16 in association with other policies and guidance provides sufficient clarity and qualitative direction, achieving the Council's aspiration, as set out in paragraphs 6.0.15-6.0.17.
- 5.1.16 *Should the plan be addressing the need for **specialised housing** for nurses and other health workers?*
- 5.1.17 The evidence base, including the Northamptonshire Key Worker Housing Needs (Matters of Fact, June 2005) (H/007/7), SHMA, Housing Strategy 2010 – 2015 and the Draft Affordable Housing Interim Statement did not identify a need for specialised housing for any particular occupations such as nurses and other health workers. Northamptonshire Key Worker Housing Needs identified that all of the local labour markets are relatively self-contained with the majority of people who live in the county also working in it. It also found that a majority of key workers show satisfaction with their housing circumstances in the county. In that research, housing did not feature as a major recruitment or retention issue either. Recruitment and retention problems were more likely to be attributed to better salaries being available in the private sector and better opportunities being available elsewhere.

- 5.1.18 The SHMA identified that the price of the existing housing stock in Northampton is the lowest in the sub-region. Therefore it is more likely for key workers to be able to afford private housing in Northampton. In addition, whilst the current findings of the SHMA indicate that no intermediate housing is required, the Council still includes intermediate housing as a vital element in the tenure mix of affordable housing requirement. This is because the Council do not believe that a requirement solely for social rented housing would create mixed stable communities that might reflect changes in households' circumstances, or might endure through changes in economic cycles. For example a household in private housing might in the future be no longer able to afford this type of housing but want to stay in the area and not qualify for social rented housing. The household might, however, be able to afford intermediate properties, e.g. shared ownership. In addition, those in social or intermediate rentals might accrue sufficient capital to afford a shared ownership property, but would otherwise have to move out of the area. Intermediate housing tenures also when included as part of the affordable housing mix aid development viability.
- 5.1.19 In summary, the relatively low price of market housing in relation to key workers salaries and the existing and likely provision of intermediate housing within the Central Area through the preferred approach to affordable housing provision as set out in additional guidance means that sufficient opportunities and choice of housing for key workers will exist.